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## POLICY ON VIOLENCE IN EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

### 1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This document is a policy of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) and relates to violence in the emergency department. Acts of violence are defined as physical assault, verbal abuse, threats, and aggressive behaviours. The incidence of violence in emergency departments is under-reported. Emergency departments have the highest incidence of violence in healthcare and up to 90% of emergency department staff have experienced some type of violence in their careers.

The policy is applicable to emergency departments in general.

### 2. POLICY CONTENT

When in an emergency department, all patients, visitors have a right to an environment that is safe from acts of violence.

All patients, visitors and staff in the emergency department have a right to a safe environment.

ACEM believes that there should be a nationally consistent “zero tolerance” approach to acts of violence in the emergency department.

ACEM acknowledges that emergency department overcrowding and access block creates an environment which may contribute to acts of violence.

### 3. PROCEDURE AND ACTIONS

- 3.1 Emergency departments must have organised policies and procedures regarding the management of violent incidents and encourage all staff to report acts of violence.
- 3.2 Staff must be aware of these policies and have appropriate training in the recognition of early predictors of violent behaviour and in immediate management of violent behaviour.
- 3.3 All emergency departments must be able to mount a timely and appropriate response to any violent incident occurring in the emergency department.
- 3.4 Incidents of violence should be appropriately reported and investigated. Potential criminal acts (such as assault or stalking of staff members) should be reported to law enforcement authorities.
- 3.5 All hospitals should provide appropriate support systems during investigations, legal proceedings and return to work for staff who are victims of violent incidents.
- 3.6 All emergency departments must have rapid access to appropriately trained security and/or law enforcement personnel at all times.

- 3.7 Based on the risk assessment, emergency departments should provide an appropriate secure environment, including physical barriers, secure locks, surveillance systems, personal duress alarm systems and separate purpose designed patient assessment areas.
- 3.8 ACEM supports the concept of more appropriately designed waiting areas and systems for the provision of information for patient and visitors in relation to department functions and activity.

#### **4. DATES AND NOTES**

*Approved by Council: March 2004*

*Last reviewed and approved: March 2011*

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